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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 07 TEL AVIV 002282

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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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ROME FOR MFO
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#). Release of Mordechai Vanunu
- [2](#). Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All major media led with the release after 18 years in jail for aggravated espionage of whistleblower, or "atomic spy," Mordechai Vanunu, which took place this morning. The Israeli media often describe the expected commotion of foreign media and Vanunu supporters as the "Vanunu festival." Speaking live to the media outside Ashkelon jail, Vanunu attacked Israel's security services, principally Shin Bet and Mossad, saying that he had been subjected to cruel and barbaric treatment during his incarceration. He added that he had no further secrets to divulge, alleging that he suffered for 18 years because he was a Christian rather than a Jew. He said his primary message was a call to open the Dimona nuclear reactor complex to international inspections. He stated that he wants to live and study in the U.S.

Ha'aretz reported that along with Israel, the U.S. will be following Vanunu's words and deeds after his release. The newspaper noted that Gideon Frank, the D-G of Israel's Atomic Energy Commission, met in Israel Tuesday with John Bolton, U/S for Arms Control and International Security. The two men discussed Vanunu's release. Ha'aretz writes that the working assumption is that Vanunu will try to cause problems for Israel. Jerusalem Post reported that acting on a tip from security sources, police detained a CNN television crew on Tuesday as it was filming near the restricted Dimona nuclear reactor in the Negev.

A Ha'aretz dialogue poll found that 47 percent of Israelis believe that Vanunu should not be released yet; 44 percent believe that he should be freed; 9 percent are undecided.

All media reported that Jordan's King Abdullah II abruptly postponed a meeting with President Bush. Jerusalem Post quoted Jordanian FM Marwan Muasher as saying Tuesday that he was persuaded the U.S. did not intend to prejudice final status negotiations between Israel and the PA. Ha'aretz reported that Tuesday senior Israeli officials called Jordanian anti-disengagement activity and its opposition to the separation fence "matters that do not at all concern Jordan, but are entirely between us and the Palestinians." Israel Radio quoted Powell as saying at his meeting with Muasher: "We should take advantage of the opportunity created by the evacuation of settlements for the first time in decades." Powell was also quoted as saying: "I think that people will see over time that the United States is committed to the welfare, benefit, and the hopes and dreams and aspirations of the Arab nations, and especially the hopes and dreams and aspirations of the Palestinian people."

Leading media reported that the IDF is leaning toward shutting down the Erez industrial zone in the northern Gaza Strip, due to the spate of terrorist attacks in the area. Leading media reported that Tuesday five Palestinians were killed during disturbances in the northern Gaza Strip towns of Beit Hanun and Beit Lahiya. Israel Radio reported that four armed Palestinians were killed there today. A series of Qassam rockets and mortar attacks was launched from

that area on targets in the Strip and in Israel, beginning early Tuesday morning.

Leading media reported that Sharon vowed Tuesday in Ashdod that his government would not give up its policy of targeted assassinations against what Israel calls "ticking bombs." Leading media quoted Hamas leader Khaled Mashal as saying in Damascus Monday that Arab and Muslims must join forces to defend themselves against the U.S. and Israel, and support the Palestinians in their worsening conflict with Israel.

All media reported that Tuesday Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz described the unilateral disengagement plan from the Gaza Strip as a "historical step" and the "right move." Mofaz was speaking to soldiers in the Strip.

Ha'aretz and Yediot reported that Monday in New York, at a meeting organized by American Friends of Tel Aviv University, former U.S. president Bill Clinton hinted that Israel should consider resuming talks with PA Chairman Yasser Arafat.

All media highlighted a remark PM Sharon's son Gilad made Tuesday to the Petah Tikva Magistrate's Court that he threw out audio tapes he had secretly recorded during conversations with businessman David Appel about the fee he would receive for his services regarding Appel's "Greek island" project.

Jerusalem Post reported that Monday in Jerusalem Finance Minister Binyamin told a 600-member solidarity mission from Michigan: "You come here because you want to ensure that Israel's present and future are secure."

Ha'aretz reported that Democratic presidential candidate Sen. John Kerry is currently investing "special efforts" to persuade the Jewish-American community to support him.

Ha'aretz reported that New Zealand police are hunting for a fourth man in the passport mystery case involving Israelis.

Israel Radio reported that this morning at least 60 people were killed and 200 were wounded in an attack against three police stations in Baghdad.

1. Release of Mordechai Vanunu:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Israeli officials regarded Bush's comments as a clear hint that the U.S. believes Israel should be able to maintain its nuclear program."

Veteran op-ed writer and the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin's assistant Eytan Haber opined in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "And if [Vanunu] opens his mouth on forbidden topics? He will receive the treatment given to any revealer of secrets, and will be prosecuted."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The cumulative damage he will continue to do to Israel as a propagandist will considerably exceed the damage he caused as a spy.... In the very act of letting him go free, Israel proves wrong Vanunu's contentions about the State of Israel."

Block Quotes:

1I. "The Triumph of Ambiguity"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (April 21): "There was a time when American officials would squirm uncomfortably when accusations of 'double standards' were leveled against them. Why, they would be asked, does the U.S. pressure Arab states and Iran to refrain from attempts to develop nuclear capacities, whereas it turns a blind eye to Israel's program? Times have changed. Today, leaders in the West openly justify Israel's nuclear program, depicting it as an insurance policy taken out by a small, vulnerable country whose hostile neighbors constantly threaten to destroy it.... [After Libya announced in December 2003 that it was abandoning its unconventional weapons program] U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was ... blunt:

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'Israel is a small country, and it is located in a region in which many threaten to throw it in the sea. Israel prefers not to be thrown into the sea, and so it has organized itself accordingly.' In his letter to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon last week, U.S. President George Bush said his country would 'preserve and strengthen' Israel's ability to 'deter and defend itself' against any threat. This assurance reiterated declarations made by president Bill Clinton to prime ministers Binyamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak. Israeli officials regarded Bush's comments as a clear hint that the U.S. believes Israel should be able to maintain its nuclear program."

II. "Now Be Silent"

Veteran op-ed writer and the late prime minister Yitzhak Rabin's assistant Eytan Haber opined in the lead editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (April 21): "Against 200 or 300 million Muslims in immediate proximity, and over a billion Muslims worldwide, stand -- if they exist -- the 'bombs in the basement.' Egyptian president Anwar Sadat hurried to Jerusalem and King Hussein wished to sign a peace agreement only because of 'Dimona.' Muslim leaders, from Iran to Pakistan, who dream at night of destroying the Jewish people, wake up in the morning drenched with sweat, upon recalling the Israeli nuclear reactor.... Mordechai Vanunu broke the secrecy of Dimona, and paid for it with 18 years of imprisonment.... Let the man please open a new chapter of his life. But the man is determined to continue to harm -- or 'destroy' in his words -- the Nuclear Research Center, and if possible Israel as well.... The man will remain silent and win his full freedom. And if he opens his mouth on forbidden topics? He will receive the treatment given to any revealer of secrets, and will be prosecuted. This is the whole story, and I personally must provide full disclosure on the matter: I served close to the decision makers in the affair of Mordechai Vanunu when the man decided to choose his odd and convoluted path, a path that is dangerous to us all."

III. "Vanunu's Release"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (April 21): "Among the many things said about Mordechai Vanunu, the Israeli due to be released from prison today after serving his 18-year sentence for revealing the country's nuclear secrets, is that he is a champion of the anti-nuclear cause. Not so. In 1981, Vanunu, with Arab activists, protested against Israel's destruction of Iraq's Osirak reactor. Vanunu, then, wasn't against the bomb outright. He apparently approved of it in Arab hands. Indeed, for years prior to Vanunu's arrest and trial, he was a pro-Arab extremist.... The cumulative damage he will continue to do to Israel as a propagandist will considerably exceed the damage he caused as a spy.... In the very act of letting him go free, Israel proves wrong Vanunu's contentions about the State of Israel."

12. Mideast:

Summary:

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized: "Those missiles are the writing on the wall. They come as a warning to all those Likud cabinet minister joining the disengagement plan from the Strip, because we're talking about a down payment."

Author and contributor Yitzhak Laor wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The difference between us and Bush and his advisers is the price that we will pay here for the crime of missing the historic opportunity to divide the country."

Former ambassador to France Ovadia Soffer wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Israeli diplomacy will be tested by its ability to exploit the interim period before the Gaza redeployment to convince the Europeans to embrace the American approach to the refugee problem."

Block Quotes:

1I. "Down Payment"

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized (April 21):

"Monday, the IDF identified dozens of attempts by Palestinians to launch missiles at Gush Katif [Gaza Strip] settlements.... Those missiles are the writing on the wall. They come as a warning to all those Likud cabinet minister joining the disengagement plan from the Strip, because we're talking about a down payment; Heaven forbid, the big payment is still to come.... Attempts to carry out terrorist attacks ... will force the IDF to continue keeping significant forces in the Strip; so why is there a need to evacuate the Jewish settlements?.... Primitive logic maintains that the Arabs in the 'Strip' are convinced that Israel is dismantling the Jewish settlements for the reason that it is surrendering to increasing terrorism. That Arab thinking will encourage an upsurge of hostile actions in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank] in order to achieve similar results."

II. "We'll Take Whatever the Americans Allow"

Author and contributor Yitzhak Laor wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (April 21): "During the decades of the occupation, the dovish camp has learned to summarize its position regarding annexation with the dogma, 'The Americans won't allow it.' Even the settler right has tended to believe that dogma, and decided to identify it with 'fear of the powerful gentile' so familiar from the Diaspora, and such. But that belief has been in stark contradiction to the facts. Since the 1970 Rogers Plan, no U.S. administration, before or after elections, in a second term or not, has ever intended to halt the Israeli annexation of the last of the land available to the Palestinians to establish their own state.... What was called 'minor border corrections' until the era of Ehud Barak has become 'land percentages,' and behind those percentages is the assumption that Israel does not have the strength to demand of itself what it demands of the Palestinians -- a civil war. Now Bush's promise has arrived as some great achievement for the coming years: the map of Israel has changed, the 'national divide' will be postponed. But what about the conflict with the Palestinians? The difference between us and Bush and his advisers is the price that we will pay here for the crime of missing the historic opportunity to divide the country."

III. "Put Israeli Diplomats to Work"

Former ambassador to France Ovadia Soffer wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (April 21): "For the first time the president of the world's only superpower is taking Israel's side and granting written legitimacy to its position on the matters of refugees and borders.... Israeli diplomacy will be tested by its ability to exploit the interim period before the Gaza redeployment to convince the Europeans to embrace the American approach to the refugee problem. They must press their Arab allies to take responsibility for the fate of the Palestinian refugees, which they have managed to evade for the last 50 years.... The disengagement plan, backed by the American president's statements, even if currently met with angry responses by the Palestinian side, could introduce an element of sobriety into Palestinian thought, at least on the matter of the right of return. It could serve as a serious incentive to Israeli-American-European action in harnessing the Arab countries to a serious joint effort to find a pragmatic and practical solution to the problem of the Palestinian refugees, without which there will be no lasting peace in the Middle East."

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